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ABSTRACT

Rhetorical critics must examine terrorism to determine what contributions they can make to the understanding of rhetoric and to the evaluation of proposed responses to the terrorist threat. Not only must the rhetorical acts of crusader terrorists be viewed as rhetoric, but they must also be considered a rhetorical genre. This genre, with the appropriate recurring forms, arises from the constraints imposed by the nature and purposes of terrorists and can be called the "terrorist-spectacular." Although access to the media is the purpose of the terrorists, the long-term goal of the terrorist groups is to change the world according to some grand design. Another goal of terrorism is to demonstrate to terrorists their own worthiness and thus to claim a sort of moral victory over their enemies. Given the important rhetorical purposes served by terrorist spectaculars, the prevention of terrorism cannot be realized through voluntary restraint or self-regulation by the news media. The most common approaches to terrorism prevention are erroneous because they are based upon false assumptions about the motivations which give rise to terrorism and about the rhetorical purposes served by violent actions. Terrorists and scholars can both benefit from the realization that terrorism cannot change the world. The carnage produced by the rhetors of terror serves no purpose. (Fifty-one notes are included.) (MS)

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The Rhetorical Genre of Terrorism: Identification and Policy Implications

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by

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> We live in a time of terror. Innocents are slaughtered, statesmen murdered, airplanes hijacked, and officials kidnapped by men and women who have brought terror out of the history books . . . and into the open, democratic societies of the post-industrial world.[1]

Statements such as this demonstrate the significance of the problem of terrorism today, making it an urgent subject for study by rhetorical critics. There is no question that the means and ends of terrorism are rhetorical. Burgess, Scott and Smith, and others have argued that refusing to study essentially rhetorical acts on the normative basis that they are irrational, coercive, or immoral is contrary to the goals of scholarly inquiry.[2] As Burgess lamented, "these judgments send coercion into rhetorical . . . oblivion in face of its increased use in resolving public controversy."[3] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell has argued, too, that "if criticism is to fulfill its functions, the rhetorical critic must proclaim: Nothing that is human symbolization is alien to me."[4] We must examine terrorism to determine what contributions we can make to the understanding of rhetoric and to the evaluation of proposed responses to the terrorist threat.

Only certain terrorist activities, however, fall within the domain of rhetorical criticism. Psychologist Frederick Hacker identified three distinct types of terrorists in the title of his book, Crusaders, Criminals, Crazies.[5] Criminal terrorists act because they receive monetary gain. Burgess has discussed the actions of criminals, and no new contributions regarding this ilk of terrorist are offered here. The crazies are psychotics who terrorize in order to gain personal glory, overcome massive insecurity, or wreak revenge on a world that scares them to death. The study of this type of terrorist is more in the

bailiwick of psychologists than rhetorical critics. Any determination of the rhetorical patterns and purposes of severely disordered is outside our expertise.

Crusader terrorists are the focus of this study. Hacker's description of this type of terrorist indicates that s/he would practice the political terrorism defined by the Task Force on Disorders and Terrorism as "violent criminal behavior designed primarily to generate fear in the community . . . for political purposes."[6] Echoing this definition, Brian Jenkins of the Rand Corporation ruefully concluded that "the use of terrorist tactics will persist as a mode of political expression, of gaining international attention, and of achieving limited political goals."[7]

Not only must the rhetorical acts of crusader terrorists be viewed as rhetoric, but they must also be considered a genre of rhetoric. Campbell and Jamieson emphasize that "the rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands," and that these recurring forms "are the means through which we come to understand how an act works to achieve its ends."[8] My purpose here is to identify the situational demands, the recurrent forms of the terrorist genre, the rhetorical purposes of the terrorists, and the probable results of some proposed responses to terrorism.

Situational Demands

Campbell and Jamieson have warned that a genre is more than the coincidental repetition of forms. A functional relationship between the situational restraints and the forms is a prerequisite to the existence of a genre. The recurring forms of a genre arise from the situational demands and the purposes of the rhetors. Simons offers this clue to facilitate the search for genres: genres "will emerge most clearly when rhetorical practices are most constrained by purpose and situation . . . Should purpose and situation be highly constraining . . . we should be able to predict much of what rhetors will say before they say it."[9]

Terrorists are so restrained by situation and purpose that they should not have taken us by surprise as they did. Terrorists seek to change the world, yet they lack the power to do so. They are unwilling to work cooperatively within the institutions they seek to overthrow and thus cannot use conventional tools of political power. Nonetheless we would be mistaken if we confused their use of violence with an intent on the part of the terrorists to seek conventional military victory. Aware of their absolute impotence as armed forces, "terrorists do not try to take and hold ground or physically destroy their opponents' forces. While terrorists may kill . . . the objective of terrorism is not mass murder . . . Terrorism is theatre."[10] Terrorists, too small and weak to obtain conventional military victory, are forced to use violence rhetorically. According to Laqueur, "the terrorist act by itself is next to nothing, whereas publicity is all . . . The real danger facing the terrorist is that of being ignored."[11]

Terrorists, newspeople, and media experts "share the assumption that those whose names make the headlines have power, that getting one's name on the front page is a major political achievement."[12] Gerbner and Gross opined that "representation in the world of television gives an idea, a cause, a group its sense of public identity, importance, and relevance. No movement can get going without some visibility."[13] Modern terrorists seek such visibility by committing acts that fit the media news agencies' definition(s) of news. There should be little doubt that terrorist violence amply fulfills Johnpoll's newsworthiness criteria:

> First, news must be timely . . . Second, to be newsworthy an event must be unique; it must deviate from the routine monotony of simple everyday existence . . . Third, an adventure would be newsworthy . . . Fourth, a news event must have some entertainment value . . . Fifth, news may require that an event somehow affects the lives of those being informed of it.[14]

Seekers of media access have a history of responding propoerly to the entrance requirements defined by newsworthiness standards. Boorstin described various examples and called them "pseudo-events."[15] Mander placed some of them

in this hierarchy: "Press conferences got coverage at once. Rallies brought more attention than press conferences. Marches more than rallies. Sit-ins more than marches. Violence more than sit-ins."[16] Wanton violence not only demands news coverage, but it also has priority over less dramatic pseudo-events.

Recurring Forms

In response to these access and power restraints, terrorists of the modern media have responded with appropriate and recurring forms. These forms, arising from the constraints imposed by the nature and purposes of terrorists, comprise a genre Bell has called the "terrorist-spectacular." Bell describes this colorful example of the genre:

> Traditional notions of what constitutes a good story have not changed--personal drama, violence, suspense, and, if possible, sex. Small wonder that, as a newsworthy event, one of the greatest magnets for the broadcast media in the 1970's was the long-running adventure of Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army: beautiful young girl, famous parents, weird villains, shoot-outs, the incredible transformation of girl to guerrilla, and a trial at the end, with various unsavory revelations. The coverage was massive. And why not? After all, the great shoot-out was seen live, in color. The SWAT machine guns were real. The blazing house might--who knew?--hold Patty. And everyone, including her parents, could watch the action.[17]

Bell has identified the three criteria that define a terrorist-spectacular as location, violence or the prospect of violence, and movement over time. Terrorists who fulfill these criteria are able to magnify the import of their deeds. The size, quantity, duration, and impact of their violence are increased dramatically. Bell's examples illustrate these criteria well:

> A terrorist-spectacular first should be staged in an ideologically satisfactory locale with more than adequate technological facilities. Munich was ideal--No Justice for Palestine, No Peace for the World, not even at the Olympics, and several thousand journalists and cameramen on the spot. . . .
>
> Second, the terrorist drama must offer the reality or prospect of violence. Unlike conventional television serials, the violence is real and the outcome uncertain. While the prospect of violence to hostages is within the terrorists' control, they have also written a part for the security forces outside their direct control. . . .

> The third component of the successful terrorist-spectacular under optimum conditions is movement--the change of scenery that allows the cameras to follow the actors from one site to the next--coupled with the passage of time. The Croatian hijacking in 1976 managed to include New York, Chicago, Montreal, London, and Paris, with Rekjavik in Iceland thrown in. The Croatian spectacular ran for thirty hours . . . long enough to command the broadcast media for three days and the front pages from Saturday to Monday.[18]

The terrorist whose forms fulfill these criteria transcends mere access to the media. Such a terrorist is no longer subject to the judgments of news executives; rather, the news agencies become his/her pawns. Journalistic responses are inevitable because the newsworthiness criteria are so inflexible and are never questioned. When critics charge journalists with inciting spectaculars, they will "continue to insist that, as always, they simply covered the news."[19] The sincerity and integrity of journalists in defending the newsworthiness standards, since they are not an issue here, can be assumed. The news, however, is being created and staged by terrorists solely to attract news coverage.

Bell reported the results of a recent Rand Corporation study of sixty-three terrorist incidents between 1968 and 1974 which found that terrorists "achieved a virtually one hundred percent probability of gaining major publicity whenever that was one of the terrorists' goals. And it nearly always was."[20] To place this success in perspective, research by Rutkus indicates that Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Ford received simultaneous network time to address the nation forty-four times by requesting such time on forty-five occassions.[21] The President of the United States, arguably the most powerful person on earth, has had slightly less success than terrorists in obtaining desired access to the mass media. The clearest explanation for such amazing success was provided by Bell:

> These new transnational gunmen are, in fact, television producers constructing a package so spectacular, so violent, so compelling that the networks, acting as executives, supplying the cameramen and the audience, cannot refuse the offer. Given a script with an uncertain ending, live actors . . . and a skilled director who choreographs the unfolding incident for maximum impact, television is helpless.[22]

The viewing/reading public encourages this coverage. The news-consuming public demands certain coverage from profit-seeking news organizations, and the news agencies must fill the demand or lose their audience and thus the reason for their existence. Within the limits set by newsworthiness, good taste, and the integrity of news executives, these news organizations must give the public what it wants--dramatic entertainment.

Viewer/reader motives for attending to the news certainly affect what is presented. Even the most egalitarian news agency needs an audience. Altheide notes that "with few exceptions, viewers seldom watch the evening news in order to learn about topics experienced independently of news channels. Rather, people watch the news because that is where newsworthy events are presented."[23] The audience has taken the newsworthiness definition to heart and anticipates the daily results. Clearly, the attitudes of news agencies and their audiences allow terrorists to gain the coverage they seek.

The constraints of situation and purpose--the desire to change the world and the lack of any means of doing so--have led terrorists to respond with recurring forms. They stage their spectaculars in proper locations, include violence or the prospect of violence, and provide movement over time to assure access to the media. The forms of the terrorist spectacular are Campbell and Jamieson's "stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands."

Rhetorical Purposes

Access to the media is not the whole story. Terrorists have other purposes that are served by the violence portrayed in the media. Access is only a short term goal that must be seen as the means to a greater purpose. The media are used to carry a message from and/or about the terrorists to a global audience. This message is intended to facilitate their ultimate purpose of changing some part of the world. The violent acts required by the need for media access put further restraints on terrorist rhetoric. At the same time, the violent deeds

serve several rhetorical purposes that words alone could never serve.

In order to make sense of terrorism we must abandon the erroneous assumption that the purpose of terrorists and terrorism is ideological conversion of the masses. We will never understand terrorist rhetoric if we follow Decker and Rainey's prescription to ask ourselves the question: "What role should the communication scholar play in the investigation of terrorism as an attempt to communicate radical ideological arguments to an audience?"[24]

Contrary to the authors' intentions, my answer is that our only role as communication scholars is to dispel the notion that prompted this question. My argument is that it is illogical to conclude that terrorists seek converts when they stage their spectaculars. Terrorists find themselves in a situation which precludes mass persuasion. We would therefore have to take a rather dim view of terrorists' intelligence to infer that persuasion is their major purpose.

The violent terrorist-spectaculars--necessitated by situational constraints--do little to enhance the ethos of terrorists in the eyes of the mass audience. If persuasion is seen as their goal, terrorism becomes paradoxical because "the spectacular massacres appear fruitless displays by men and women frustrated beyond reason . . . horror on horror's head that gains not power but publicity that, in fact, is counterproductive."[25] The paradox can be resolved only by understanding the real purposes of the rhetors of terror.

Even if the mass audience could ignore the negative ethos generated by the forms of the genre, the terrorists would be unable to persuade the masses. The terrorists espouse ideologies that are so alien to our experiences and beliefs that we cannot understand their ideologies, much less accept them. The inability or unwillingness of terrorists to work within the institutions they seek to supplant is strong evidence of the great ideological distance between their beliefs and those of the mass audience they reach through the news media.

The terrorists seem aware of their inability to persuade the masses just as

they are aware of their impotence as military forces. Terrorist groups do not raise funds to print and disseminate literature. They do not frequently take advantage of their ability to extort media presentation of their ideologies and demands. Even in the infrequent attempts to extort media presentation of their ideologies, no serious attempt to persuade the mass audience can be inferred. Ideological statements have been so scathing, polarizing, and full of inexplicable argot that they could not have been aimed at any audience but the "community of the blessed." Booth believes that this is a general tendency of the New Left, "as if all hope were lost of winning outsiders to become insiders. As if no reasons were needed to prove the essential rightness of one's cause, only reasons for stepping up one's energy level."[26] At least one observer was moved to remark that, for all the meaning they had to the mass audience, the terrorists might just as well have presented their ideologies in Chinese.

The ultimate purpose of all terrorist groups is to change the world according to some grand design. Ideological persuasion cannot be used to facilitate this goal because of the situation and the two audiences reached by terrorism. The first audience--the loyal followers of the movement--do not need to be converted. The second audience--the masses--cannot be persuaded because the ideologies of the terrorists are incomprehensible and because the necessary violent actions of terrorists create a negative reaction which prevents conversion.

The dismissal of ideological conversion as the purpose of the terrorists does not mean that terrorists do not purposefully convey rhetorical messages. The key to understanding the terrorist rhetor lies in realizing that the terrorist sends his/her messages by performing his/her violent spectaculars rather than by utilizing the vocal or written channels one would expect if s/he were really trying to persuade us of the rightness of his/her cause. The same violent deed sends distinct messages to the two audiences of terrorism; the dedicated followers of the movement and the mass audience, or, insiders and outsiders.

Messages to Insiders

By conducting a successful terrorist-spectacular, the terrorist can persuade the loyal minions that "even if their aspirations are no closer to reality, they can at least still act on events."[27] Denied the ability to immediately form their utopian dreams into social realities, terrorist groups must be satisfied with simpler accomplishments. The importance of this message to terrorist group morale should not be underestimated. Laqueur argues that ideology is less of a motivation for terrorists than the ability to act. He sees terrorist groups as being motivated by "a free floating activism that can with equal ease turn right or left. Terrorism . . . is not a philosophical school--it is always the action that counts."[28] This argument presents another difficulty in accepting the idea that ideological conversion is the purpose of terrorism.

Another goal of terrorism is to demonstrate to terrorists their own worthiness and thus to claim a sort of moral victory over their enemies. In their examination of confrontation as rhetoric, Scott and Smith discuss how the enemies of totalistic rhetors are attacked by symbolic rites. By causing death, destruction, and fear despite the best efforts of law enforcement officials, the terrorist can claim an important victory: "By the act of overcoming his enemy, he who supplants demonstrates his own worthiness, effacing the mark, whatever it may be--immaturity, weakness, subhumanity--that his enemy has set upon his brow."[29] In just such a manner, the weak outlaw terrorist band removes the negative labels the enemy society has attached to the terrorist movement.

Terrorists can also claim victory for themselves whenever they succeed in gaining concessions from the authorities in exchange for releasing hostages or agreeing not to detonate concealed explosives. The terrorist can rejoice in a limited victory when authorities are forced to release "political" prisoners, feed the poor, guarantee immunity from prosecution, provide transportation to safe havens for political exiles, or allow the publication/broadcast of

ideological statements or lists of demands. Terrorists can persuade themselves and their followers that their heroism, determination, and essential rightness assure them of eventual victory over the enemy who obviously lacks the "stomach for the fight." According to Scott and Smith, radicals may "work out the rite of the kill symbolically. Harassing, embarrassing, and disarming the enemy may suffice, especially if he is finally led to admit his impotence in the face of the superior will of the revolutionary."[30]

Lacking the final victory they seek, the terrorists can still rejoice in the ability to act and in claiming moral victories over the enemy. The evidence certainly supports many of the terrorists' boastful claims to victory. Despite the authorities' best efforts, fully seventy-nine percent of all members of terrorist teams have escaped both punishment and death.[31] Any concession or forced action on the part of the stronger authorities becomes a terrorist victory, including the airing of ideologies, grievances, or demands. This is a far more satisfactory explanation of the purposes served by terrorist violence than is the counterintuitive notion that terrorists attempt mass ideological conversion.

Messages to Outsiders

Denied the ability to persuade large segments of society or to conquer by force of arms, terrorists have scaled down their purposes. The first step in the terrorist strategy is to make outsiders aware of their existence. Although this awareness is merely a prerequisite to a broader rhetorical strategy, it is important enough to discuss at length.

To insure our awareness of their existence, terrorists must gain and hold our attention and implant their deeds in our memories. The level of awareness is a function of the quality of the terrorists' violence. In evaluating some of the recurring forms of terrorism, Jenkins identified this hierarchy of quality:

> Hostage incidents seem to have greater impact than murder, barricade situations more than kidnapping. Hostage situations may last for days, possibly weeks. Human life hangs in the

> balance. The whole world watches and waits. By contrast, a death, even many deaths, are news for only a few days. They lack suspense and are soon forgotten.[32]

Jenkins went on to argue that the Croatian hijacking of an airliner in 1976, which fulfilled all of the characteristics of the genre, is much better remembered today than the sudden deaths of seventy-three persons caused by a terrorist bomb placed aboard a Cubana airliner just three weeks later. Adherence to the generic forms made the death of one person more successful than seventy-three deaths in an incident which demonstrated only one of the three forms of the genre. Patty Hearst and the S. L. A., the P. L. O. and the Israeli commandoes at Entebbe (the basis of a popular television docu-drama), Black September killers and Israeli athletes in Munich, South Moluccans and Dutch school children, and the Hanafi Muslims in B'Nai B'Rith headquarters in Washington D. C. have become universal memories through successful enactment of the terrorist genre in response to situational restraints.

Other evidence supports the importance of quality in terrorist-spectaculars. Government officials as well as members of the public have often erroneously commented on increases in terrorism even during years which witnessed actual decreases in both the number of terrorist incidents and the damage inflicted. Laqueur attributes the discrepancy between reality and perception to the "dramatic character" of the smaller number of incidents staged by terrorists.[33] All of this indicates that the genre of the terrorist-spectacular is a normative one. The genre is a description of reality and a prescription for success in gaining the awareness terrorists seek. The demands of situation and purpose are both met by adherence to the forms of the genre. This is how the violent acts of terrorists work to achieve their ends.

The rhetors of terror must be cognizant of other variables which influence their success in gaining awareness. Since other events in the world compete for

the finite time and space provided by news channels, "timing is important. Terrorist violence is easily submerged by higher levels of conflict, individual acts of violence lose their meaning in a war."[34] More important news may push terrorism off the air or relegate it to the back pages of the newspaper. The public's attention, interest, and memory are diverted to the greater conflict and drama offered by a war. Terrorists must take care not to split our attention by staging simultaneous or nearly simultaneous spectaculars lest the impact of their actions be diminished. Laqueur provides more evidence of their success:

> Only a few years ago, newspaper readers in the Western world were led to believe that the German Baader-Meinhof group, the Japanese United Red Army, the Symbionese Liberation Army, and the British "Angry Brigade" were substantial movements that ought to be taken very seriously. Their "communiques" were published in the mass media; there were earnest sociological studies on the background of their members and their motivations; their "ideology" was analyzed in tedious detail. But these were groups of between five and fifty members, and their only victories were in the area of publicity.[35]

Having succeeded in gaining our attention and our awareness of their existence, what further rhetorical purposes are served by terrorist violence? One major goal of the terrorists is to persuade us that they are credible. Terror obviously does not produce traditional Aristotelian ethos. Terrorists, instead, seek to be perceived as credible terrorists. The credible terrorist is capable of producing great fear, of representing the courage and commitment of his/her small band of followers, and of stymieing any attempts to prevent his/her actions.

Political terrorists cannot risk being perceived as akin to criminals or crazies. Crusader terrorists can distance themselves from the riffraff of the terrorist world by behaving in the way described by Weisband and Roguly:

> For the terrorist, the path to legitimacy is through one's reputation for resilience, for self-sacrifice and daring, for brutality, and, above all for effective discipline over words and actions. . . . It is the credibility that violence produces, whenever it appalls, that renders terrorism horrifying yet powerful and, if successful, self-legitimating.[36]

This kind of credibility is useful in obtaining the response terrorists really hope to incite in the audience of outsiders. This credibility allows the terrorists to create "an emotional state of extreme fear in target groups."[37] All of the authorities on terrorism agree that terrorists seek to create fear. The real issue confronting the rhetorical scholar is the purpose behind creation of fear.

The creation of fear is the only terrorist strategy that attempts to make a direct contribution to their long-term goals of changing the world. One of the few facts we can safely assert is that terrorism has not yet achieved the long-term goals of its practitioners. There is no Palestinian homeland, no free Croatia, no liberation of South Molucca, no end to British domination of Northern Ireland, no return of the Shah or his wealth to Iran, and no sign of radical transformations in the structure of Western society. Terrorists seeking radical changes in the structure of society in Western Europe, Japan, Israel, and the United States have sought to directly facilitate such change by the creation and manipulation of a climate of fear within these societies. Dobson and Payne described this strategy:

> The philosophers of terror have assumed that one of their principal aims, the creation of a climate of repression in liberal societies would become easier. They hoped by this repression to achieve what they call the alienation of the masses which then prepares the way for revolution. But in Europe and the United States the theory has not worked out. . . . The police state, a step on the road to revolution, has failed to emerge.[38]

The creation of mass fear as an inducement to repressive responses places the liberal regime's authorities at a disadvantage. Liberal regimes have popular support because they practice the freedom they preach. The members of a liberal society will presumably be unsatisfied with the status quo if these liberal policies are sacrificed as the authorities attempt to clamp down on terrorists. In his instruction to terrorists, Carlos Marighella made this theory clear:

> The war of nerves or psychological warfare is an aggressive technique . . . In psychological warfare, the government is always at a disadvantage since it imposes censorship on the mass media and winds up in a defensive position . . . At this point it becomes desparate, is involved in greater contradictions and loss of prestige.[39]

The provocation of repressive responses by authorities serves other purposes of the terrorists as well. A recent investigative report on the Palestine Liberation Organization conducted by ABC-TV hypothesized that one of the major goals of Palestinian terror is to prompt violent responses from Israeli authorities. The hope is that the responses will be violent enough to anger Israel's allies, erode domestic support for the existing government, and show potential P. L. O. supporters that the Israelis are not the good guys in this conflict.[40]

This strategy was described by Scott and Smith as a standard technique of totalistic rhetors. To counter the negative reactions aroused by their violence, the terrorist hopes to provoke an equally violent response from the authorities to show them at their worst. The violent confrontation, if it incites sufficient fear and anger, invites the authorities to "show us how ugly you really are."[41]

The Israelis have been provoked. Besieged by an unprecedented level of terror, the Israelis have embarked on a campaign of counter-terror. They have planned and carried out assassinations of P. L. O. leaders in many nations and have repeatedly staged retaliatory bombings of guerrilla bases in Lebanon despite the unavoidable deaths of innocent civilians involved in both tactics.

According to ABC's report, these responses have resulted in some discontent within Israel, although the government does not face extermination. The international repercussions may be greater. The United States, Israel's staunchest ally, has objected to the use of U. S.-supplied arms in the retaliatory bombings and has expressed regret that the Israelis continue to practice counter-terror. The cause may be less direct, but in recent years the P. L. O. has risen from total

obscurity to become the darling of the United Nations. Whether any of these results indicate the eventual demise of Israel remains to be seen.

The Failure of Terrorism

The previously-noted failure of terrorism to create a climate of repression in Western nations can only be explained in two ways. Either the terrorists have failed to create sufficient fear or a fearful public has not responded in the way terrorists want it to respond by demanding repressive measures. The failure is probably attributable to a combination of these causes.

The terrorists are probably not wrong in assuming that excessive fear will lead to an increased willingness of the public to rely on the authorities for protection. The terrorists, however, seem utterly unable to understand the nature of liberal government. Perhaps because their ideology demands it, terrorists seem unable to accept the fact that governmental actions in a liberal society reflect, for the most part, the actual desires of the public. Since the power is really in the hands of the public, that public will not be alienated by any repressive measures it asks the government to implement for its protection. Both of these considerations are documented by Gerbner and Gross:

> Ritualized displays of any violence (such as crime and disaster news, as well as mass-produced drama) may cultivate exaggerated assumptions about the extent of threat and danger in the world and lead to demands for protection. What is the net result? A heightened sense of risk and insecurity is more likely to increase acquiescence to and dependence upon established authority, and to legitimize its use of force than it is to threaten the social order.[42]

Since the public demands the protective responses from authorities, they are unlikely to be alienated by these responses. Terrorists will never succeed unless they can provoke the authorities into taking actions contrary to popular will. This they have not done. Terrorists have been noticeably ineffectual in the United States. Prior restraint on the media is still taboo--live coverage of terrorist-spectaculars goes on unabated. We have seen the publisher of workable

plans for a nuclear weapon go unpunished, the Bill of Rights is still intact. The only significant response has been the annoying but uncontroversial screening of passengers in airport terminals.

Terrorists seeking to induce fear in this country may also have neglected the ways in which American viewers respond to news events. The obvious failure of their strategy might be attributable to audience response patterns to the most popular and credible source of news in America--the television networks. Our lack of fear might be the result of the way in which television news is presented. Sperry believes that television news is conveyed to the audience in a narrative version of the classical heroic myth; she argues:

> As the keystone of each network's evening programming, television news attempts to build and hold its audience by lifting elements of that mythic formula which is the basis of its entertainment programs. Av Westin, former president of ABC news, says that he expects an audience to come to his news program asking "Is the world safe and am I secure?" There is clearly a link between that question and the answer provided by a news structure that plots events along the lines of a hero story: The world at peace is disrupted by some event (say, an act of terrorism). That event, which becomes the evil, is named and, if possible, analyzed and understood. It is then attacked by some leader, the hero figure, often a representative of the people.[43]

Various explanations can be offered for such a presentation of the news, but if we accept Sperry's claim, the relevant issue is the effect such a presentation has on viewer responses to terrorist violence. Sperry's description of audience responses bodes ill for the terrorist strategy of creating fear. She believes that "by structuring an event as a plotted story, involving all the drama of filmed confrontation . . . the television newsman deliberately invites his audience to respond to the news in the same way that it responds to entertainment programming."[44] If all of this is true, terrorism cannot even succeed in creating fear, much less in provoking repressive responses.

Sperry's theory explains the failure of terrorism without denying its successes. The memorable successes of terrorist rhetors seeking to arouse our awareness of their existence are memorable in the same fashion as a good novel, play, movie,

or television program. The failure to create sufficient fear is due to the fact that the violence found in modes of entertainment lacks immediacy. Our fear ends when the movie, or the news, is over. The only lasting effect of such fear is our memory of having been thoroughly entertained. Our fear of terrorists becomes an unidentifiable component of the "heightened sense of risk and insecurity" that Gerbner and Gross hypothesize as the net result of real and fictional televised violence. Sloan recognized the psychological distance maintained by the audience:

> To a public both fascinated and repulsed by the carnage they often witness on the evening news, terrorism is something to be observed, not experienced. Skyjacking, kidnapping, and assassination attempts are often perceived to be a deadly game between authorities and terrorists, while the victims mutely await their uncertain fates.[45]

The failure of terrorists to incite repressive countermeasures is an important one, whatever its causes. Combined with their inability to persuade or conquer us, terrorism becomes an impotent means of attaining long-term objectives. These are fatal flaws. In Fromkin's words, "terrorism only wins if you respond to it in the way that the terrorists want you to . . . The important point is that the choice is yours. That is the ultimate weakness of terrorism as a strategy."[46]

Terrorism only succeeds in transmitting the desired messages to insiders. The world cannot be changed by means of terrorist spectaculars. The fact that the terrorists must satisfy themselves with fleeting and ultimately meaningless victories does not diminish the relevance of discussing proposed solutions. We are not necessarilly charged with preventing terrorists from realizing their utopian dreams. If they seek desireable ends, we should help terrorists find other means of attaining these ends--more peaceful and more effective means. Our duty is to mitigate the carnage the terrorists have yet to produce.

Policy Evaluation

A great deal of pressure to find solutions to terrorism arises from growing fears that terrorist violence might one day escalate beyond current levels of

destruction. The writings of law enforcement officials are rife with speculation about the possibility that terrorists might graduate to weapons of mass destruction or to sabotage aimed at killing hundreds of thousands rather than scores of people.

The evaluation of proposed solutions requires, and is currently lacking, an understanding of the rhetorical purposes of terrorists and of the social context in which they operate. Media terrorists owe their existence to liberal societies. A media spectacular could be staged in the Soviet Union, but it would not be covered by Tass or Izvestia. Laqueur asserts that the real question "is not whether terrorism can be defeated--even a third rate dictatorship has shown that it can be put down with great ease."[47] Dictators can stop terrorism by denying access to the media, by trampling human rights in rooting out terrorists before the fact, and by executing terrorists without regard for the lives of hostages or bystanders.

In liberal societies, however, "as long as terrorism exists, there will continue to be clashes between the perceived need for increased social control and the protection of individual liberties."[48] All of the authorities on terrorism disregard prior restraints on the media and enactment of repressive law enforcement measures as unacceptable prices to pay for solution of the threat posed by terrorism. The prevention of terrorism by law enforcement exacts an unacceptable toll on civil liberties. Therefore, we have had to settle for attempts to reduce the damage.

In the absence of official responses that are both socially acceptable and efficacious, some observers have urged the news media to respond voluntarily by agreeing to regulate themselves. The three basic kinds of self-regulation proposed by different observers will all be evaluated here.

Some suggest that the news media should agree that no coverage will be given to terrorist-spectaculars. After all, these advocates reason, if the media gave birth to these terrorists, they can eliminate them be reversing their actions. Perhaps the biggest problem with such a voluntary ban is that it would very

quickly become a battle of wills between the determined terrorists and the reluctantly-complying media. We can easily predict the winner of such a battle if Bell's gloomy scenario becomes a reality. Bell's fear is that "potential television terrorists frustrated by the imposition of any such ban might well devise a more awesome media event that would force coverage--an escalation of horror."[49]

This disadvantage is not the only drawback to such a ban. The proposal fails to consider that terrorism sends a powerful message to insiders regardless of the coverage received. Terrorists can reassure themselves that they are heroic, that they have the ability to act, and that they can beat the authorities for a short period of time. If such insider-directed messages are as important as they appear, such a voluntary ban does not eliminate the utility of violence and thus offers no solution to terrorist violence.

Others suggest that contextual coverage is the solution. The media would be asked to downplay spectacular coverage and to provide the audience with information about the size, strategies, and goals of terrorist groups. This proposal, too, fails to consider the messages sent by violence to insiders. The proposal also fails to realize that "the quality of the coverage is quite immaterial to the terrorist's purpose; only the intensity and quantity of coverage matter."[50] The only potential benefit of contextual coverage would be to provide additional insurance against the possibility that terrorists might someday create a level of extreme fear. If we know terrorists are impotent we should not fear them. If we know they are seeking fear and repressive countermeasures, we should be far less willing to play the dupe by offering the desired fearful response.

Yet another group of observers would ask the media to provide terrorists with free access to present whatever messages they desire. The most glaring inadequacy of this proposal is its failure, like the others, to account for the messages conveyed by the actual violent deeds that could not be conveyed in words. Free access would only allow the terrorists to present their grievances or

ideologies in hopes of persuading us. Since they are unable to persuade us, we cannot even be sure that the terrorists would accept the offer.

This proposal also erroneously assumes that providing an additional means of attaining a goal does not necessitate nor motivate the abandonment of other means. The different purposes served by violent and nonviolent rhetoric in the terrorist strategy mean that both retain utility. Jenkins believes that since "the use of terrorist tactics has won them publicity and occasional concessions," the value of violent deeds "will suffice to preclude the abandonment of terrorist tactics."[51]

Given the important rhetorical purposes served by terrorist spectaculars, we must conclude that the prevention of terrorism cannot be realized through voluntary restraint or self-regulation by the news media. The most common approaches to terrorism prevention are erroneous because they are based upon false assumptions about the motivations which give rise to terrorism and about the rhetorical purposes served by violent actions. Terrorists and scholars can both benefit from the realization that terrorism cannot change the world. The carnage produced by the rhetors of terror serves no purpose.

My hope is that this identification and analysis of the genre will spark future efforts and direct the evaluation of proposed solutions into the domain of rhetorical criticism. Without the insights and knowledge of rhetorical critics and theorists, any evaluation of proposed solutions is bound to go astray. The stakes are too high for us to gamble on untested solutions.

Notes

[1] J. Bowyer Bell, "Terrorist Scripts and Live-Action Spectaculars," Columbia Journalism Review, May/June 1978, p. 47.

[2] Parke G. Burgess, "Crisis Rhetoric: Coercion vs. Force," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (1), pp. 61-73; and Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith, "The Rhetoric of Confrontation," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (1), February 1969, pp. 1-8.

[3] Burgess, p. 63.

[4] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Criticism: Ephemeral and Enduring," The Speech Teacher, 23 (1974), p. 14.

[5] Frederick J. Hacker, Crusaders, Criminals, Crazies: Terror and Terrorism in Our Time, (New York: Norton, 1976), passim.

[6] National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, Task Force on Disorders and Terrorism, Disorders and Terrorism: Report of the Task Force, (Washington: The Advisory Committee, 1976).

[7] Brian Jenkins, "International Terrorism: Trends and Potentialities," Journal of International Affairs, 32 (1), 1978, p. 115.

[8] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action, (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Assoc., 1977), pp. 19-21.

[9] Herbert W. Simons, "Genre-alizing About Rhetoric: A Scientific Approach," in Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Assoc., 1977), p. 42.

[10] Brian Jenkins, "International Terrorism: A Balance Sheet," in Contemporary Terrorism: Selected Readings, ed. John D. Elliot and Leslie K. Gibson, (Gaithersburg, Maryland: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1978), p. 235.

[11] Walter Laqueur, "Terrorism Makes a Tremendous Noise," Across the Board, January 1978, p. 62.

[12] Laqueur, p. 57.

[13] George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," in Television; The Critical View, ed. Horace Newcomb, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 368.

[14] Bernard Johnpoll, "Terrorism and the Mass Media in the United States," in Terrorism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, ed. Yonah Alexander and Seymour Maxwell Finger, (New York: John Jay Press, 1977), pp. 158-159.

[15] Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image, Or What Happened to the American Dream, (New York: Atheneum, 1962).

[16] Jerry Mander, Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, (New York: Morrow-Quill, 1978), pp. 31-32.

[17] Bell, p. 48.

[18] Bell, pp. 48-49.

[19] Bell, pp. 47-48.

[20] Bell, p. 49.

[21] Denis Rutkus, "Presidential Television," Journal of Communication, 26 (2), 1976, p. 75.

[22] Bell, p. 50.

[23] David L. Altheide, Creating Reality: How Television News Distorts Events, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), p. 25.

[24] Warren Decker and Daniel Rainey, "Terrorism as Communication," an Unpublished Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, New York, November 13, 1980, p. 3.

[25] Bell, p. 47.

[26] Wayne C. Booth, "The Scope of Rhetoric Today: A Polemical Excursion," in The Prospect of Rhetoric, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 97.

[27] Bell, p. 50.

[28] Laqueur, p. 60.

[29] Scott and Smith, p. 4.

[30] Scott and Smith, p. 4.

[31] Bell, p. 49.

[32] Jenkins, "Trends and Potentialities," p. 119.

[33] Laqueur, p. 64.

[34] Jenkins, "Trends and Potentialities," p. 119.

[35] Laqueur, pp. 59-60.

[36] Edward Weisband and Damir Roguly, "Palestinian Terrorism: Violence, Verbal Strategy, and Legitimacy," in International Terrorism, ed. Yonah Alexander, (New York: Praeger, 1976), pp. 278-279.

[37] Yonah Alexander, "Terrorism, the Media and the Police," Journal of International Affairs, 32 (1), 1978, p. 102.

[38] Christopher Dobson and Ronald Payne, The Carlos Complex: A Study in Terror, (New York: Putnam, 1977), p. 208.

[39] Carlos Marighella, "Minimanaual of the Urban Guerrilla," in Terror and Urban Guerrillas, ed. Jay Mallin, (Coral Gables: Univ of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 104-105.

[40] "The Unholy War," 20/20, an investigative report produced by ABC News, narrated by Geraldo Rivera and Hugh Downs, April 2, 1981.

[41] Scott and Smith, p. 8.

[42] Gerbner and Gross, p. 391.

[43] Sharon Lynn Sperry, "Television News as Narrative," in Television as a Cultural Force, ed. Richard Adler and Douglass Cater, (New York: Praeger, 1976), p. 135.

[44] Sperry, p. 141.

[45] Stephen Sloan, "International Terrorism: Academic Quest, Operational Art, and Policy Implications," Journal of International Affairs, 32 (1), 1978, p. 1.

[46] David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," in Contemporary Terrorism, ed. John D. Elliot and Leslie K. Gibson, (Gaithersburg, Maryland: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1978), p. 23.

[47] Laqueur, pp. 61-62.

[48] Jenkins, "Trends and Potentialities," p. 123.

[49] Bell, p. 50.

[50] Bell, p. 50.

[51] Jenkins, "Trends and Potentialities," p. 115.